compañeras: zapatista women's stories

THE FINAL STRAW RADIO SEPT II, 2022

Hilary talks about her 7 years of living in Chiapas and recording the stories and experiences of women there, collecting stories on their behalf. The book covers the Zapatistas experiences before the EZLN uprising of 1994, during that period and after. Discussion address what gender, indigeneity and class looked like and how that's changed in the Zapatista communities, the state of Chiapas and in Mexico. William and Hilary also explore the effects that the EZLN & La Otra Compaña have had on radicals and anarchists abroad, the origins of the EZLN, some parallels and distinctions between anarchism and Zapatismo and much more.

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TFSR: Will you first introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what you do?

Hillary Klein: Yes. Thank you so much for inviting me to share this time with you and your listeners. My name is Hillary and I currently work at an organization called the Center for Popular Democracy, which is a national network of community based organizations working for racial justice, economic justice, and immigrant rights. I've been doing social justice work for a long time, but that included several years that I spent in Chiapas, Mexico, working with Zapatista communities in indigenous villages, and specifically with women's projects. So I feel like it's all connected, because whether it's here in the US or whether it's abroad, I feel like it's all one vision of a world of greater justice and greater dignity. The book that I wrote came out of that experience working with women's cooperatives and women's projects in the Zapatista communities.

TFSR: So you went to Chiapas through your work?

HK: Not in the sense of for a job. I went to Chiapas was actually in 1997 thinking that I was just going to stay for a couple of weeks or maybe a couple months. So, I was there originally as a human rights observer and as a volunteer on solidarity projects, but it was such a compelling movement and such a fascinating time. I felt like history was kind of unfolding before my eyes. How could I not say and witnessed it or be part of it in some way? So I ended up staying, and I stayed on, and I ended up staying about six years. Much longer than I had expected. So, I was there from 1997 till about 2003. So I've been back in the US for a little more than 10 years doing what I consider to be the same work, but it's not actually like I was working for the same organization or anything.

TFSR: I do want to talk to you more about your time in Chiapas in a later question. But just to lay some solid groundwork for any listeners who are unfamiliar, would you be willing to talk us through some historical bullet points of the Zapatista movement?

HK: Yeah, of course. So the Zapatista movement is also called the EZLN, which is a Spanish acronym for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. It's primarily a social movement, a very broad grassroots radical social movement in southern Mexico, fighting for indigenous rights for

land, but for also for a whole kind of host of broader demands that I think are very universal in the sense of: for dignity, for justice, for equality, for democracy, and has really resonated with people around the world.

So, in addition to being a social movement, it also has a rebel army. They did choose the path of armed struggle. After many years of fighting for change in their own context, out of a sense of desperation, seeing children die from preventable diseases, for example, they chose the path of armed struggle, feeling like they had no option left but to stand up for themselves and force the government to listen. The communities and Chiapas are historically extremely poor, extremely marginalized. That's really a legacy from colonialism. The history of racism, the history of economic exploitation, all that goes back, more than 500 years. Those legacies are still things that those communities are facing today.

The Zapatista movement comes out of that history of 500 + years of indigenous resistance, it also comes out of the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. So the name Zapatista comes from Zapata. Emiliano Zapata was a hero of the Mexican Revolution who fought for 'Tierra y Libertad,' land and freedom. So they very much carried on that banner. But they also recognize that neoliberalism or global capitalism, whichever you want to call it, is kind of the current political and economic system, which reproduces many of those same legacies of inequality, of injustice, and exploitation that began with colonialism.

So, they actually rose up in arms on January 1 1994. That was the same day that NAFTA, which is the North American Free Trade Agreement, went into effect. They chose that day to highlight that relationship with global capitalism, with neoliberalism. So that's where many of us around the world first heard of the Zapatistas. For myself, speaking personally, it was really an important moment. It came kind of at the tail end of the Cold War. So there was this question in the air for people of my generation, I was 19 at the time in 1994, of what the next wave of social movements would look like after the end of the Cold War. The capitalists were claiming victory, free trade - the market won. So it was really inspiring to see this model of this example of what a new social movement might look like. It's really inspired people ever since then. So that was 20 + years ago.

After that very brief armed uprising, the Zapatistas have not used their weapons ever since then. They do still have an insurgent army. That's, I think, an important thing to know about them in terms of their character as a very militant movement. But it's also in reality, it's much more of a broad social movement, in terms of its actions, and has become

much more known for peaceful mobilizations, for political marches and other actions, for convening civil society. Mexican as well as international civil society, to come together and talk about the different problems that we face different strategies of how we can find solutions collectively and build a world of of greater dignity and justice.

It's also become very known for its project of indigenous autonomy. So in its own territory, in eastern Chiapas, they've developed autonomous governments, their own health care and education systems. They have a whole system of economic cooperatives, which have developed an economy that's based on cooperation and solidarity, rather than one that's based on on profit.

TFSR: I was really struck by... because there's lots of parts in your book, and a lot of its interview based, but I remember reading that the Zapatistas would come down from the mountains posing as teachers, or whoever, and just start talking to people. And it has so much an emphasis on people talking to each other and being like, "why are you so poor? Why don't you have as much to eat as you need? Why do you need to do all this work?" Trying to get people's wheels turning.

HK: Definitely. I think that that same concept that you're pointing out, of dialogue, I think has been really important within the Zapatista movement. But also, when I mentioned convening civil society at the national or international level, I think that same concept of dialogue that you're describing has really been important in terms of how the Zapatistas have engaged with people around Mexico and around the world. Using that same process of listening to each other, of asking questions that really makes each other think, "Why is this injustice the case? What can we do about it?" And so I think that that's been one of the ways it's been so effective for them to spark people responding by organizing in their own contexts around the world.

TFSR: And it seems like those conversations were extremely non coercive, meaning that people were like, "Oh, there's this meeting where people are talking about it, come to it if you want."

HK: I think that's right. So, when I mentioned that 1994 was the Zapatista uprising, the very brief uprising, they had actually been organized in clandestine way for 10 years before that, from 1983 to 1994. 1983 is when

the EZLN was formed in the mountains of the jungles of Chiapas. So for the next 10 years, they were doing exactly what you're describing, talking to people in the villages, asking them questions, encouraging them to organize. There was very strong movements in Chiapas like I mentioned. People turn to armed struggle, because they had already been, many people who became Zapatistas, had been engaged for years and years in campesino movements, for example, or indigenous rights movements, asking for land reform from the government, for example, and really seeing no response.

The Zapatistas often referred to themselves, and have been called, 'the voice of the voiceless.' So it's really the sense of very, very marginalized, kind of forgotten corner of Mexico and people making this decision to take their own destiny into their own hands. So I think when the original core guerrilla nucleus that formed in 1983, began to really reach out for people in the villages. It just was a very fertile moment for people to say, "Yes, it's time. We need to take this to a whole other level and demand our rights and do that in a determined and courageous way."

TFSR: I'd love to talk a little bit about your book, which is called '*Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories,*' and it is heavily interview based, drawn from interviews, many of which you conducted yourself, with people who directly experienced working with the EZLN and you mentioned that you lived in Chiapas itself from 1997 to 2003. Would you talk a little bit about more about your time living in Zapatista communities in Chiapas?

HK: Like I mentioned, when I went down there I wasn't planning to stay for so long. But one of the reasons that I felt like history was kind of unfolding before my eyes.. The Zapatistas movement in itself was incredibly inspiring to me at that time. I was so struck by it. But in particular, the role of women has always been crucial. I think this is true for many social movements. This had been my experience, personally, as well as something I had studied was the experience of women within many social movements, where on the one hand, there's this opportunity, and you are engaged in this whole new way, and at the same time, even within that social movement, women have had to fight for their own rights within that to defend themselves.

So, I have had this kind of long standing interest in women's participation in radical and revolutionary social movements. So when I got to Chiapas, it was that particular aspect of history, that was unfolding before my eyes were, on the one hand, women have played a critical role in the Zapatista movement from the very beginning, and at the same time, had to push for a lot of changes internally. There was a lot that was still evolving and unfolding. I was very struck by that combination of these amazing, strong, courageous, inspiring women leaders. And also the participation of women within the Zapatista movement was continuing to evolve. That was what compelled me to stay for so much longer.

I got involved with the women's cooperatives in particular, because it's an economic space for women to generate resources collectively and invest those resources back into their communities. But because it's an all-women's space. There are all women's collectives, and all men's collective, that really stems from, because gendered division of labor still exists to a large degree. So women's collectives tend to be artisan collectives, or vegetable gardens, or chicken raising collectives.

Because they are all-women's spaces, they're also really an area where women oftentimes come to voice and come to their own sense of power for the first time. It's the first time they might be participating outside of the home or learning to speak up. So it's kind of like a springboard for women's involvement in other ways in the Zapatista movement.

So that was the kind of work that I was drawn to. This coworker and I developed a project kind of hand in hand with the Zapatista women leaders, their kind of regional representative. So we had sort of an ongoing conversation with them about what might be useful, and what would be helpful for us to do as outsiders, and develop this project of supporting women's cooperatives and women's regional organizing in general. So that was what I did for most of the time that I was there in Chiapas.

TFSR: Apart from artisanal stuff and vegetable gardening, and what were some of the projects that the women's collective did?

HK: They were each organized around whatever different economic activity they decide. This is just one way that women are organized. But in particular, in economic cooperatives, women often talk about how the first step is to get together as a women's meeting or women's assembly and decide to form a cooperative, and then decide what type of cooperatives they want to form. So, they might decide, for example, to start a vegetable garden or to start a chicken raising collective and they'll each contribute something like one peso each to buy seeds and start the vegetable garden,

or they each contribute one hen, and then that's how they start to chicken raising collective.

Some of the ones that are most common... Those ones that we mentioned, the artisan cooperatives, tend to be for outside consumption, so they sell more to an external market. A lot of the other ones are really more geared towards internal consumption. So even as they're generating resources, with vegetable gardens for example, they're addressing nour-ishment in their communities. That's a big source of health problems, because people have historically had a pretty limited diet. In addition to generating those resources, they're also producing for local consumption.

Another example of that is sometimes the women open collective stores. Because some of these villages are very isolated, it also allows people in the villages to buy from a local store, instead of having to travel just for basic goods. So, individuals don't have to travel two or four or six hours to the closest city. The cooperative store does that buying and selling. So it's making a little bit of money, but it's also providing that service to the local community. And then the women collectively decide how they want to spend those resources. So they might be responding to emergencies, like if one woman is very sick, they can help her out, or if there's a political mobilization, or they might decide to invest in the autonomous school.

So, there's a lot of different ways, but that decision making process also is very important. It's another way that is very empowering for the women who are involved to be engaged in, "Okay, we've generated these resources. Now, what do we want to do with the resources that we've generated?"

TFSR: The issue of food is so important, because it seems that so many of the women that you interviewed are indigenous women, and who were born into what I might call, a kind of indentured servitude. Is that completely inaccurate? Food was a very, very restricted resource for people who were subsistence farming to sustain themselves, but they were given for the most part infertile land or lands that just nothing would grow on.

HK: Yeah, absolutely. Some of what we were talking about earlier in terms of the legacies of colonialism have to do exactly with what you're talking about, where the land that historically had belonged to indigenous peasants, was basically stolen from them. And ever since colonialism has exist-

ed, it has been really concentrated in the hands of a very few wealthy families in Chiapas that are basically European descended. Even though there have been some stages of land reform in Mexican history. Some of the biggest fincas, in a lot of parts of Latin America they're called haciendas, in Chiapas are called fincas, they're basically large plantations. When we think about the South in the United States, for example, the plantations, that historic cotton picking plantations. That type of economy. Where in Chiapas, they weren't literally slaves, but like you said, they were basically indentured servants.

So, even though those exact same structures didn't exist anymore, it looked very similar in terms of the indigenous peasants having either to live and work full time on the fincas, or they have these very small plots of land up kind of on the rocky mountainside where basically nothing grew. So land and the food that they produced was just a huge source of inequity, or manifestation of that inequity, the injustice that people were living with. People actually talk about the hunger months, 'el tiempo de hambre', when their corn had run out from one season and they hadn't harvested the corn from the next season and there's this kind of gap in between where they just literally didn't have enough to eat.

So, that's kind of historically what people were dealing with. It was just so very core to people's lives and people's experiences.

TFSR: You mentioned that you came over to Chiapas. Could you speak about writing on this topic from the perspective of a relative outsider? Could you talk about how that influenced your approach?

HK: So at the tail end of the time that I was there, one of the projects that I worked on before I left was an internal document where the women wanted to record their own stories. I think Zapatista women recognize that they've been part of something pretty historic, and they wanted to record that for themselves. But they also really wanted to use it as a tool for education for organizing with other women. So I did that project, which was really amazing. You mentioned earlier, that a lot of the books is heavily based on interviews that I did with different women. And so a lot of the interviews were kind of throughout the time that I was there. But a lot of them were particularly from this time period, when I was doing this project with the women that was initially just for themselves. But once we finished it, and they have this product, which was like a popular education manual. It was really geared towards them not only having their own sto-

ries documented, but being able to kind of use it to educate and organize other women. They themselves said, "You know what? We actually really want to share these stories with an outside world as well. And how do you feel about doing something like this book, but for an outside audience?"

I tell that whole story, because I feel like your question is coming from this really important place of what is the role of an outsider in writing a book like this. I had spent several years at that point, working very closely with the Zapatistas very much always as an outsider, right? It's not my community. It's not my context. But I was very close with the communities at that point. I would not have felt like it was appropriate for me to go and publish this book or share their stories if it hadn't been specifically a request or a suggestion that came originally from them.

I felt like it was important personally, because in this country so much has been written about the Zapatistas, but very little about women and even less in their own words. So even though it is my book, I felt like my role was much more as a cultural bridge to create a vehicle for women to share their own stories. So the book contains a lot of my own writing, where I introduce the women or I share historical background or some context, but my intention was always to do that as a foundation for an outside audience to be able to then engage with the women's stories from having the necessary background, but then to hear really directly from them.

So, like you said, the book is very heavily based on these interviews. And that was really the most important thing to me. And so just going back more concretely, to your question, I think that I, as an outsider, did have the ability to kind of create that bridge, especially in an audience in this country, but like I said, very much coming from a commitment to create the space for the women to kind of tell their own stories and people to hear as directly as possible. Because I had been so incredibly touched, and moved, and inspired by all these women that I had worked with over the years. Their stories of transformation, their stories of struggle, their stories of courage had been so meaningful to me, that when they were the ones that suggested that to me, it was such an honor to think of me creating that vehicle for them to share the stories with a broader audience.

TFSR: Yeah, for sure. And speaking as another outsider, it was really amazing to be able to read their experiences in their own words. So I've strongly benefited from that. It's a pretty incredible experience to be able to do that.

HK: I mean, the fact that you have that experience of it makes me feel like I accomplished what I set out to do.

TFSR: It's amazing that because Zapatismo has, like you said, so many visible female leaders like Comandanta Ramona comes to mind, but there hasn't been much written about Zapatista women.

HK: Yeah, there has been some stuff written for sure. There is stuff out there, but relative to how much has been written overall about the Zapatista movement, I feel like there was a real gap. What's been written about Zapatista women I feel like hasn't been thorough. So, I really felt like it was important to me.

TFSR: Will you speak to the political roots of Zapatismo. It seems to me that there were some strongly Maoist communist and militaristic currents in there. Since this is an anarchist radio show, I feel like I should ask that question to clarify that for the listening audience?

HK: One thing I think that is very fascinating, I think specifically from an anarchist perspective is that Zapatismo is a blend of many different political traditions. Political and also historical and cultural traditions that didn't come out specifically of an anarchist trajectory, but ends up having a lot in common with anarchism. I think anarchists around the world have really related to the Zapatistas because of some of these core principles that the Zapatistas have come to represent, including not trying to take State power, that they instead believe in kind of creating power from below, creating alternative institutions to the State and having a lot of very horizontal structures. And then all the stuff that we're talking about, about indigenous autonomy, and having a critique not only of the State, but of the whole political system, and they've been very clear that they're not going to turn into a political party. Which was a path that many Central American guerrilla movements too and eventually converted into political parties.

But in terms of the roots, which you were asking about. So that's all to say that the end product of Zapatismo has a lot in common with anarchism, but it came from all these very different places and political historical roots. One of the things that I think is so unique, and to the Zapatistas credit, has been their ability to draw the best of different political traditions. We were talking a little bit earlier about the history of the

Zapatista movement, there was this core nucleus of Marxist guerrillas that came out of the student movement in the 60's in the 70's throughout Mexico. They went down and formed that initial guerrilla nucleus that we were talking about in 1983. But they really began to interact with the Campesino movements, the Indigenous movements in Chiapas at the time, with the Catholic Church, which was very heavily influenced by Liberation Theology, like you said, there was Maoist groups down there at the time. I think what the Zapatistas were able to do, was to blend all that into something that was kind of new and unique, that I would now call Zapatismo that came from these very different political threads.

I think a lot of the more horizontal aspects came from the history of the indigenous communities themselves. The original core of Zapatistas who were not from Chiapas, which we're only a handful of people really. I mean, numerically speaking, the Zapatista movement is pretty much all indigenous peasants from Chiapas, but there was this original group that came from elsewhere to kind of start, at that time, their vision was much more like the the vision of the Cuban revolution.

In some of the really poetic writing about the Zapatistas themselves and how they've described themselves, Marcos, for example, who is a male non-indigenous leader that was the spokesperson for the Zapatista movement for many years. He talks eloquently about that process of indigenization of the Zapatista Army in some ways. So if people are interested, I definitely encourage them to look up some of those writings or descriptions of that process. They are very fascinating.

TFSR: Apparently, I heard that Subcomandante Marcos, who was like the leader of the Zapatista movement, abolished himself as a Subcomandante. Did you hear about that? And is that true?

HK: It is true. It's funny because he... I don't mean this to sound dismissive. I feel like everything he does, he sort of has to do with a flourish. So even the way that you describe it as like, "He abolished himself." He basically, in practical terms, what he was doing was kind of passing off the reins to other, indigenous leaders. Which I think is great. It was time for that to happen.

The indigenous communities had chosen Marcos as their spokesperson, I think they legitimately recognized that he would be able to play the role of reaching out to the world, and he's a very poetic, very philosophical, charismatic, kind of articulate leader. And at the same time, it feels right that it was time to kind of pass on those reins to the local, indigenous leadership. So it was about a year ago, he said that Marcus had died and reemerged as Galeano. Galeano was the name of a man who was killed about a year ago in an attack against one of the Zapatista communities. And so, he renamed himself Galeano, in honor of the person who had been killed. And at the same time, said that it was time for him to kind of pass this on to other leadership.

So there's a new Subcomandante, who now has that role. It's kind of an interesting dual role of military leader and spokesperson. The Subcomandante is not actually the political leader of the EZLN, there's a political body of leaders, which is kind of chosen by all the different communities. There's different layers, each community has an assembly, and then each region has an assembly, and they kind of choose their representatives at each of those levels. So, at the highest level is the political comandantes, which is a collective body of leadership, the political leadership of the EZLN. Actually the subcomandante is called subcomandante, because he is under their direct command. So the military leadership is underneath the command of the political leadership.

But because he's also the spokesperson, it's the person that people most often kind of associate with the Zapatista movement. Then what we were speaking about earlier, in terms of not hearing from women, part of that is because there has been this one person who has been kind of the most well known leader of the Zapatista movement who also happens to be a man. It's just that's like the one, if people have generally heard of one Zapatista, it's usually Subcomandante Marcos.

TFSR: You write in chapter one of your book that the injustices that people faced were the roots of the Zapatista revolutionary movement. To that end, would you describe general conditions that the women you spoke to faced before the influence of the Zapatistas?

HK: Yeah, definitely. So Comandanta Esther, who was another one of the powerful women Zapatista leaders, she one time spoke before the Mexican Congress in 2001. It was the first time an indigenous woman had ever spoken to the Mexican Congress, which itself is startling. So, she spoke to the Mexican Congress, and she talked about women Chiapas being exploited or oppressed three times over, she said, "first, because we're poor, second, because we're indigenous, and third, because we're women." I think that really gets at the heart, we were already talking about some of

the legacies of colonialism. Indigenous women deal with all of that. They deal with the racism, they deal with the poverty, they deal with economic exploitation, but then they also deal with gender discrimination.

The way you framed it, before the influence of the Zapatista movement, just as sort of an extraordinary level of lack of rights in the sense that they were pretty much confined to their home, couldn't leave their home without the permission from their husband or their father. From the very time they were girls they were basically told they didn't have rights, they didn't have a voice, their role was just to work in the home and to take care of kids. That's obviously very important, dignified work, raising children and taking care of the home, but it's not something that I believe women should be limited to.

Then in terms of the family life, women were married very young, oftentimes, against their will. When they were maybe 13 or 14 years old, their father would arrange a marriage for them, basically. Then women oftentimes had 10, 12, sometimes 15 kids, and so had very little control over their own lives, their own bodies, the decisions that impacted their lives. The realm of public decision making was really dominated by men.

So, the Zapatista women, the older women, this is what their lives were. They oftentimes talk about, the first chapter of the book is called something like 'stories of our mothers or grandmothers,' because they oftentimes refer to these as the stories that our mothers, our grandmothers had told us, including the Zapatista women who were still around today. This is what they grew up with, just this really intense level of discrimination and marginalization.

TFSR: I had a thought, because I remember reading an interview with one person, I don't remember what her name was, but she basically described the difference between societal men's work and women's work. She said that, "the men's work is hard, yes, but people get to take breaks, and we never really get to take breaks. We have our, like you said, our 13 children, two babies on our hip, grinding flour for tortillas, and getting water and cleaning the house and doing all sorts of odd jobs, and also caring for many, many children, and not ever getting to take a break. People often were just ill a lot be from overwork and malnourishment and all that stuff." So I found that really striking.

HK: Yeah, it's kind of extraordinary. And, like you said, in terms of the women's workday, they talk about the kind of double workday that I think

women in this country still experience. The expectation that after a day's work, you come home and women are still largely expected to be the ones doing primary childcare and taking care of the home. But it was to such an extreme degree, like you said, women were basically working nonstop from the moment that they woke up to the moment that they went to bed. Oftentimes would go out to the field and work side by side with the men. So that was, "men's work" was working in the fields. But then once men were done with that day of work, they would kind of come home and rest, whereas the women would come home and then continue to do all the other work that they were doing, the domestic work and everything else that you were describing.

TFSR: We're talking about a lot of positive aspects of the EZLN. And there are many, many, many of them. But since it's an organization that's run by people, and people are flawed, I wanted to bring up a quote that I was struck by on page 95, which goes, "women's right to own or inherit land has not been staunchly defended by Zapatista authorities in the ways that their equal right to political participation has." Will you speak about the cultural and social aspects of this dispute?

HK: Yeah, so, when we were talking earlier about how important land is, it's important to the indigenous communities of Chiapas economically, because it is the source of food and of income. Also as indigenous people, it's really important to them, culturally, spiritually, this concept of Mother Earth. They don't think of land as private property. So, the Zapatistas carried out a bunch of land takeovers in 1994 in the same context of the uprising, one of the other actions that they took was these land occupations, and then they redistributed these fincas that we were talking about before, to indigenous peasants, Zapatistas, throughout the state of Chiapas. That made a huge difference in people's lives. When we were talking earlier, also about the 'hunger month,' when people didn't have enough crops to literally feed themselves throughout the year, people living on this retaken land, this land was much more fertile, they had more access access to more land. That means just a huge difference in people's lives in terms of their kind of economic livelihood, in terms of their food security, and again, in terms of their identities as indigenous people, it's culturally, spiritually, just having a territorial base has been super important and to the Zapatista movement in terms of having an area of land where they are experimenting with all these other aspects of society. The society that they're building. All of that has been very important. Like I said that they don't think of land as private property, but it is still divided. So, individuals will work on a particular parcel of land, so they don't own that land, but that's their kind of parcel of land to farm on. And the Zapatistas... I think it's one of the few areas where, like you said in that quote is compared to women's political participation, the EZLN as an organization has very staunchly defended women's right to be involved in the movement at all levels, but with the access to land, it hasn't been. It's actually one of the few areas that stood out to me, where the EZLN, I believe, could have been more proactive, and hasn't been. So, they've kind of reproduced some of the gendered assumptions that women don't need access to land in the same way. When they have divided up, for example, the land that they took over, they divided up those individual parcels primarily to men. Then it was up to, it's mostly individual families to decide, as they pass land on to the next generation, if they would pass it on kind of equally to the sons and daughters, or just to the son.

When we were talking earlier about women fighting for their rights within different social movements. They've continued to push and it is kind of an internal debate. I think there's been a lot of movement around it. A shift has definitely taken place. But I think we haven't seen as big as a shift there in terms of access to land for women are equally between women and men as we have seen some really pretty incredible shifts and other types of transformations that women have experienced.

I think it's just a fascinating example that no movement is perfect, none of us as individuals are perfect, and our social movements aren't perfect either. For me personally, it's one of the few areas that I think the EZLN could have taken a more proactive stand in terms of the women's agrarian rights.

TFSR: Yeah, I mean, these kinds of social societal changes happen so slowly and revolutionizing the way that we overthrow misogyny in ourselves and in our communities, I think will be a thing that will last the entirety of humans lasting. However long that may be.

On the on the note of some of the more positive social changes that the EZLN brought about, one of the more striking changes of the organization was a women's revolutionary law, which was shared publicly after 1994. Will you speak about this law and about its role in Zapatista history.

HK: The women's revolutionary law was written and passed by the EZLN in 1993 leading up to the Uprising. Then they shared it publicly, like you said, after the Uprising in 1994. It was a very important document, and I'll talk in a second about some of what it contains. But I think it was very important, both in terms of all the work that went into it, and then all the work that has happened since then to implement it. So there's this one point in time when it was passed, but also represents, like you were saying a second ago, that change takes time.

Iin the end of the late 80's and early 90's, like when we were talking earlier about the clandestine organizing that the EZLN was doing in the communities. One very important aspect of that was, and in particular, oftentimes, it was women insurgents who were talking to women in the different villages, and really sort of instigating that same sense of asking about injustice that we were talking about earlier, women were doing that specifically around women's rights and around gender discrimination and asking women, "do you think life really has to be like this? How else could life look like?" And so all these women's assemblies and talks and conversations went into creating the women's revolutionary law. So, there were the political leaders as well as the military leaders, early women leaders in that time, really carried out the series of conversations. That was what became the women's revolutionary law. So they drew up all of those proposals into this document that was passed by the political leadership, the comandantes, in 1993. It became a framing document regarding what women's rights in Zapatista territory are.

So, in terms of what it actually says, it talks about women's right to participate in the movement at all levels. That gets at their political participation, their leadership in their communities, their ability to be military leaders in the Zapatista rebel army. But it also talks about a very broad range of areas of life. And so it talks about women's right to health care and education. It talks about women's right to live free of violence. It talks about about women's right to decide who to marry and how many children to have. So, it really addresses across both public and private spheres, family life, community life, political life. And in some ways, those rights are very basic, but putting each of them into practice is hugely transformative.

Then once the law was passed, the work that then came to implement it was work of consciousness raising, work of education, work of changing those family norms. I think if you look at each one of the points in the revolutionary women's law, there has been huge transformation

that's taken place. I think it's so important that you asked earlier about what were women's lives like before the Zapatista movement, because that helps give us an understanding of just how extraordinary those transformations were. From that situation that the women describe themselves, their mothers, their grandmothers living in, to what Zapatista women have achieved in really an incredibly short period of time.

On the one hand, I totally agree with what you said a second ago about patriarchy, that it's something that it takes a huge amount of time to uproot. I can't really fault the Zapatistas for not having ended patriarchy in the 20 years that they've been at it, because I don't think anywhere in the world, I don't think there's been anywhere that patriarchy has been completely uprooted.

TFSR: That'd be such a tall order.

HK: And if there is somewhere out there, and your listeners know of that place, please let me know,

TFSR: You'll be the first to know, definitely,

HK: That'd be great. Maybe one of you listeners will call and let us know. "This is where patriarchy has been uprooted."

But there was a huge amount of transformation that took place in this very short time period, in types of changes that I think in many contexts take sort of generations to unfold. The level of women's political participation, the level of their leadership in the movement, the changes that have taken place in the home, I think those points of the revolutionary law have really, to a large degree been implemented by women choosing if they want to marry at all, and if they do, who they settle down with, how many children they have.

So, there's a lot of work to be done. But there's also just a tremendous amount that's been accomplished. And that I think, is also really at the heart of why I wanted to publish this book, and why I wanted to create that vehicle for women to tell their own stories, because not only are those transformations so incredible, but I think there's so many lessons to be learned. It is a very different context. What it can look like, what it can mean to accomplish those types of transformations in our own lives,

TFSR: Obviously, the EZLN has had a lot of international effects on

people. Will you speak to some of the impacts that this movement has had on radical and anarchist societies and other countries, especially concerning the involvement of women? And to what extent do you see it still having an effect?

HK: Definitely. I do really believe that ever since 1994, the Zapatista movement has been one of the most impactful social movements around the world that has just had a tremendous ripple effect in terms of influencing and inspiring people around the world. And I think there's some really concrete examples of that and at the same time, I think it's really hard to measure, but just kind of undeniably out there.

So, one of those really concrete examples is the anti-globalization movement of the late 1990s. So if folks remember or have heard of the protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization, or some of the other mobilizations that were taking place around the world. That really was something, the Zapatistas helped plant the seeds of that movement in some of those gatherings that I was talking about earlier that the Zapatistas have acted kind of as conveners of those conversations.

So they invited people to their territory, and people came throughout Mexico, but really from all over the world. And they really put this call out for anyone who's been negatively impacted by global capitalism. So whether that's because you are a student, or a worker, or a housewife, or transgender person, or whatever the case may be. When I was talking earlier about their demands being very universal, but I think it's also been that type of call to anyone who has been exploited, oppressed, who's faced injustice, and so many different people from so many different walks of life respond that call. So in the late 90's, the focus of that was really in the context of neoliberalism and thinking about how can we address that. So the anti-globalization movement of the late 90's. It wasn't the only thing, but it was one of the things that really helped plant those seeds.

So, that's, I think, you know, one concrete example. But besides that, there's so many different collectives, organizations, groups around the world that have been influenced by the Zapatistas. It's hard to name or measure that impact. But I do feel like it's intangible, but undeniable. I think young people today continue to be inspired by the Zapatistas. They're not in the spotlight in the same way they were kind of 10, 15, 20 years ago. But I continue to hear constantly about different examples of people who are really influenced by the Zapatistas, inspired by them, and then concretely influenced by them.

And in terms of women, I think it has been a really key example of not only having a movement that has strong women leadership, but a movement that's also been able to evolve. When we were talking earlier about the roots of Zapatismo and I was saying that one of the things that makes the Zapatistas somewhat unique, I think, is their ability to draw from different political traditions and kind of be fluid and adapt. Their approach to gender is an example of that. So even though on the one hand, they were always committed to women's participation, but there has also been a real evolution of their gender analysis. They would not use the word 'feminist,' it's not the term they would use, but I think they have developed a much more nuanced analysis of gender and really taken on this question of, "What does it look like to uproot patriarchy?" So, yes, it will take time. But there's been kind of a whole new series of strategies to address patriarchy to really uproot it. I think that that is so inspiring and is something that many of us in different social movements around the world can still really look to as a model that there's a lot that we've won, but there's a lot more to do.

I think the Zapatistas, and for me, personally, the Zapatista women in particular, but one of the aspects of the Zapatista movement that I think that really resonates is this combination of, on the one hand, being kind of humble enough to know that they don't have all the answers. So, they have this philosophy of 'making the road by walking' and constructing the world of justice and dignity that they want to live in building that step by step, stone by stone. So, I think that humility is really important to know that we don't have all the answers, nobody has all the answers. But at the same time, having kind of the the chutzpah, having the courage to say, "that's not going to stop us" from dreaming big and from taking on global capitalism, or from declaring war on the Mexican government. And for women, it's not going to stop them from you know, asking, "How do we address patriarchy? And how do we take all this stuff on?"

So I think that combination, that humility combined with the courage to dream big, and act on those dreams, is the one kind of thing that I would like to leave your listeners with. I think that message is true in general, but for me, as a woman, I would say, in particular, for women, women engaged in other struggles where it's all connected, right? Women's rights are connected to economic justice and social justice and racial justice. And as we fight for all those things in this interconnected way, that's kind of the message that if there was one thing I would choose that I would like to share what I took away from those years that I spent in

Chiapas, and what I kind of hoped to convey in the book, that would be it.

TFSR: Hilary Klein, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us about your book Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories, which is available from Seven Stories Press and I highly, highly recommend it. It's a really, really good read and I learned a lot from it. Thank you so much for talking with me today.

HK: Oh yeah, it was such a pleasure chatting with you.



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